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ABSTRACT

More than a decade ago the manner in which the North Dakota educational community related to the state legislature changed suddenly and dramatically. The North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA) employed a new executive director. Administrators in the state created a new entity, the North Dakota Council of School Administrators (NDCSA), and secured a new executive secretary. The North Dakota Education Association (NDEA) expanded its staff and diversified its services. The agendas of these groups suggested collaborative approaches to problem solving, and the mix of personalities permitted that collaboration to occur. In theoretical terms, North Dakota progressed from a "locally based disparate" to "statewide monolithic" linkage in a very brief period. The actors in the "North Dakota monolith" were those predicted in Iannaccone's (1967) theory. The scope and nature of collaboration among individuals and organizations and the resulting achievements are detailed. Each of the leaders of the three dominant state education associations was interviewed with a 17-question structured interview instrument in the spring of 1986. The interviews with these leaders, actual observations of their behavior in various settings and the products of that behavior, along with socioeconomic and demographic characteristics in the state, are related to current organizational theory. (MLF)

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A STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS LEADERSHIP STUDY IN COOPERATION: THE NORTH DAKOTA EXPERIENCE

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A STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS LEADERSHIP STUDY IN COOPERATION: THE NORTH DAKOTA EXPERIENCE

More than a decade ago the manner in which the North Dakota educational community related to the state legislature changed suddenly and dramatically. Several events occurred which to the casual observer at that time may have seemed independent and unrelated. The events, however, coalesced to create a circumstance which permitted an unusual, perhaps unique, series of achievements.

The North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA) employed a new executive director. Administrators in the state created a new entity, the North Dakota Council of School Administrators (NDCSA), and secured a new executive secretary. The North Dakota Education Association (NDEA) expanded its staff and diversified its services. Further the NDSBA and NDEA elected individuals for titular leadership who manifested remarkably similar agendas.

The agendas suggested collaborative approaches to problem solving. The mix of personalities permitted that collaboration to occur; in fact, the collaboration extended into arenas not typically entered by similar sets of actors in other states.

The change should not have been surprising. Iannaccone (1967) described the phases -- the chronology of "structural linkages" -- which a unit (a state) might be expected to exhibit over a period of time in a dynamic environment. In theoretical terms, North Dakota progressed from a "locally based disparate" to "statewide monolithic" linkage in a very brief period.

While coalitional activity in the politics of education is integral to the monolithic typology, we believe the scope and nature of collaboration among individuals and organizations in North Dakota to be instructive to other states and the resulting achievements to be truly remarkable.

North Dakota's Education Coalition and Politics of Education Typology

The actors in the "North Dakota monolith" were those predicted in Iannaccone's theory; they were the same actors employing the same coalitional tactics reported for other states in earlier studies (Aufderheide, 1976; McGivney, 1984). Prominent were the state school boards association, the state teachers association, and the association of school administrators. Like other states, parents' groups, parochial school interests, and advocates for certain curriculum interests (e.g., modern foreign languages) were not so much excluded as they were neglected.

As in other states, the monolith developed certain practices such as data sharing, interorganizational consulting, and coordinated lobbying. The practices permitted the accommodations, the trade-offs, necessary to present a "united front" to the legislature. Where accommodations were difficult or impossible to achieve, muted arguments occurred and accommodations were sought. (For instance when the school boards association wished to delay, by a month, the date when teacher contract nonrenewals were to be finalized and the teachers association preferred no change, each organization announced itself satisfied when a change of fifteen days was legislated.)

While the accommodations which led to coordinated lobbying should not have been surprising (the theory predicted that course), the new found habit of cooperation spilled over into other mutual enterprises. The group coordinated its lobbying efforts in work to secure increases in foundation program dollars and improvements in support for special education costs. The efforts were supported by cooperative data gathering of budgetary information, salary and benefit information, and a range of other detail. The data were sometimes analyzed and published separately, but the arguments over who possessed the

correct data were muted. One participant described this new found agreement about the data base as "playing music from the same page."

Perhaps more remarkable, collaboration was not restricted to coordinated lobbying. The state legislature enacted a tough teacher evaluation law that required administrators to assess the performance of every teacher at least twice during the year. In response, the three partners developed "Evaluation for Growth" Seminars which were held annually beginning in 1981. These activities employed teams -- board members, teachers, and administrators -- to examine supervisory practices, to urge policy development at the local level, and to suggest promising (and humane) supervisory processes targeting instructional improvement and staff development. By 1984, 268 teams representing 255 districts had participated. (Some districts returned more than one year; the "unduplicated" count was estimated to be 154 districts.)

North Dakotans like citizens elsewhere during this period experienced rapidly increasing health care costs. Where fixed dollar benefits had been negotiated, teachers tended to be hurt by this circumstance; where fixed benefits had been negotiated, boards tended to be hurt. Moreover, given the small school size (and consequent small staff size) which characterized North Dakota districts, the capacity to address this concern locally simply did not exist, and the generally favorable experience rating which teachers often enjoyed was simply diluted by inclusion of other individuals and groups in determining rating experience.

The collaborating groups formed an insurance trust to attempt to ensure comprehensive coverage at reasonable cost. The trust, North Dakota Educators Insurance Trust, provided an economy of scale simply not available to most local districts. Further, it provided a rating base, and an element of

competition, previously not available. At least sixty of 240 high school districts in the state belonged to the trust. Trust officers reported success-- coverages had been maintained, even expanded, while costs had plateaued. (Though the plateauing of health care costs may have reflected a larger societal phenomenon.)

The group initiated another collaborative effort, the "Network for Excellence." The Parent Teacher Congress (PTC), county extension services, and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) were invited to participate in this activity. Representatives from the parent groups identified and examined programs that worked (instructional programs but other programs and ideas as well) and, when convinced of program promise or utility, sharing occurred through the already established communication vehicles of the several partners.

Still other examples of cooperation existed. A "Committee to study Educational Compensation" was convoked to examine whether and how the career ladder and merit pay ideas might promote or inhibit achievement of educational goals. Membership for the committee was consciously drawn to represent, about equally, the three groups. Deliberations yielded no spectacular conclusions; practice changed little. The effort, however, evidenced another example of sincere and cooperative examination of an issue.

The groups cooperatively studied "collective gaining" methodologies. Districts, boards and teachers, willing to try the techniques were identified and trained. Five districts employed the practice in 1985-86. The collaborators planned continuing examination of the techniques and predicted expansion of the number of districts willing to attempt this bargaining modification.

To illustrate the scope and nature of collaborative efforts in North Dakota, a contrast with coalitional activity in another state appears warranted. Karper and Boyd (1988) found that education interest groups in Pennsylvania, reacting to a strong governor's initiative, coalesced to present a united front on public school funding. Similarly, North Dakota's state education associations responded to the legislature's enactment of a teacher evaluation statute by coalescing to develop an "Evaluation for Growth" program for local school districts. The Pennsylvania experience, according to Karper and Boyd, involved the phenomenon of a single issue coalition. On issues other than public school funding, there existed little unity. In contrast, North Dakota's experience was characterized not only by a defensive reaction to legislative action, but, more significantly, by cooperation across many issues and concerns as described in the preceding paragraphs.

When groups determine to advance their common interests, they frequently ignore, even suppress, their natural differences. Peterson (1974) asserted, "Educational interests cooperate to obtain as much of the state spending pie as they can." Peterson, discussing Lowi's work, also acknowledged that "typically conflict (among and within groups) seems to be of ... the distributive variety."

Tensions over state school funding practices appeared to be building. As Peterson suggested, the tensions involved distributive issues. Districts which did not receive severance (energy) tax monies perceived that those who did were favored; larger enrollment districts wished to review indices which rewarded smaller high school districts at rates higher than those for the larger districts; districts with more mature special education programs perceived the practice of providing supports based on statewide averages of

excess costs to work against them; disparities in effort (local mill levies) had been increasing; the "equalization factor" had not changed from twenty mills even though average millages had increased about 60 percent during the past decade (from 98.33 mills in fiscal 1978 to 124.41 mills in fiscal 1986); enrollments in some districts continued to decline; and transportation support issues abounded (the density - distance compromise was about to unravel). The monolith strained. Predictable was the reassertion of district self-interest: Iannaccone's third stage, a "statewide fragmented" linkage.

Whether collaborative endeavor in other domains could occur while people argued over money remained to be seen. The actors had demonstrated considerable capacity to agree to disagree on some issues, such as the subject of binding arbitration to resolve impasses in the collective negotiations process, while continuing to work together on other issues. Can this spirit remain when the original and, perhaps, primary object for initial collaboration -- securing as much of the state spending pie as possible -- became less crucial to the actors?

Kirst and Somers (1981) suggested that rational economic models of collective action, such as Olson's, and coalition building, such as Riker's, did not explain the various motivations that caused groups to come together and stay together for and beyond the original purpose. They contended that more flexible modifications of the models reflect the reality of state level cooperation over a wide range of issues. Such modifications "allow for subjective perceptions, imperfect information, uncertainty and noneconomic incentives, such as loyalty and ideological commitment" as determinants of cooperation and collaboration. We suggest the latter modifications to the fixed rational economic models to be characteristic of the attitudes and actions of the state education associations leaders in North Dakota.

We believe the continuation of cooperation among state education associations actors may well, to a considerable degree, depend on who the leaders are and their attitudes and actions regarding each other and their own organizations. It was apparent that leader characteristics had much, if not everything, to do with the inception of collaborative efforts among the three state level associations. The employment of new leaders at about the same time in two of the associations (NDSBA and NDCSA) occurred when there existed suspicion and distrust between two of the associations (NDSBA and NDEA). Therefore, North Dakota's state level education achievements at a time of continuing economic downtrends in oil and energy and agriculture, the state's major economic bases, require us to look more closely at the leaders and their qualities.*

EDUCATION COALITION'S RECORD CONSIDERED UNIQUE IN NATION

The above headline in North Dakota Education News (September 9, 1982) heralded the start of something new in North Dakota's education history. The article accompanying the headline said, among other things, that the "Coalition for Public Education" was composed of the NDSBA, NDEA, NDCSA and the North Dakota Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTC).

> Meeting monthly since early last year the coalition has tackled several problems head on, such as the state's education finance shortfall. In addition, because of ite newly established avenues of communication among association leaders, it has headed

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*Does the "time make the man" or does the "man make the time"? Historians tend to debunk "great man" theories for explaining events; our paper does not intend to resurrect that theory. We do believe, however, that unique events and particular personalities coalesced in a manner which resulted in activity and achievement which would not have been possible (or would not have occurred to the degree described) except for both the events and the personalities. Thus, we see personality, in this case, to be a powerful reenforcing characteristic in the activity reported.

off potential problems within the education community.

. . . . . .

> Coalition leaders summed up their efforts in various comments contained in news releases throughout the year. Their current working relationship, they said, is unique in the country. It signals, they maintain, 'a new era of cooperation in which education organizations are getting their act together for the definite good of public education all across the state.'

We interviewed each of the leaders of the three dominant state education associations in their offices with a 17-question structured interview instrument in the spring of 1986. One of the leaders had left his position as executive secretary of the NDCSA and, at the time of the interviews, was superintendent of the largest local school district in North Dakota. For the purpose of discussing the interviews with these leaders in the pages that follow, we have identified each leader as follows: R.O. is the NDSBA's Executive Director, L.J. was the NDCSA's Executive Secretary, and W.H. was the Acting Executive Secretary of the NDEA.*

Executive Director of the NDSBA

One of the interview questions dealt with the qualities each leader believed marked an excellent state level education leader. The executive director of the NDSBA, R.O., said he thought personal honesty was a prerequisite to leadership. That meant a leader had to look honestly at every situation and translate those observations into action. One action is to call

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*The authors acknowledge that the actors interviewed were all male; moreover, some of the activity reported (both literal and figurative activity) had a male--almost "little boy"--quality. Nevertheless, we believe it would be inaccurate to characterize the coalitional activity as an artifact of an "old-boy" network. Several of the prominent actors, while not central to our report, were female. One female, the titular head (the elected "president") of NDSBA, has since become the Assistant Executive Secretary of the Association. The current president of the NDEA is a woman. Both of these individuals exert considerable influence in their respective organizations and both have continued to encourage the type of coalitional activity reported.

people back immediately who telephone in a perceived problem. He said there are no return call telephone messages on his desk or anyone else's in the office. Further, a state level leader should know the field of education thoroughly. That meant knowing the state school legal code, the system of school financing and the education people in the state.

The executive director was then asked to rate himself on these qualities. He found rating himself difficult to do and said

> I'll go home some nights so depressed, so upset because of something I did or did not do the way I wanted. Other times, I'm just on cloud nine. I have a good deal of confidence, however. I do think that generally I'm trying to do the right thing. I never have any regrets from the standpoint that I've done something wrong intentionally. I've done things that were wrong and harmful but not because I set out to do them.

The foundation for R.O.'s judgments about himself was based on two factors. One was the inherent or intuitive "feel" he gets when he has acted, and the second is the observable reactions of other people or "feedback" to his actions. He compared his thoughts here to hitting a baseball. "'Hey, I hit that ball real well that time' plus the crowd yelling 'hooray.'"

R.O. went on to say that a large part of his job was testifying before the state legislature. The legislators are also his friends, his colleagues. Much of the testimony he gives involves an informal dialogue with the legislators. "If they ever catch me lying," R.O. said, "or being inaccurate or evasive, I'll destroy my credibility, and that's all I have with them." Similarly with the association's membership, if they find him to be wrong, R.O. said that could be disastrous for him. For R.O., honesty was extremely important from a pragmatic point of view. Then R.O. revealed a dark side of his past that carried the honesty issue beyond mere pragmatic considerations.

> I went through a phase in my life where I sort of compromised a lot of my earlier values, and I was lying. I was doing a lot of things I wasn't very proud of. I hated myself for what I was doing. I was a very heavy drinker and with the drinking came the lying. Ten years ago I quit drinking, and I reverted back to the values I had in the beginning. I feel good about it and think honesty needs to be practiced twenty-four hours a day.

R.O. said he receives phone calls at night because of some very late local school board meetings. "I don't have time to think about what I am going to say," R.O. claimed, "I have to answer honestly and spontaneously. The spontaneity is based on honesty." R.O. concluded that he was never in a position to guard himself. He never knew what question would be asked or where it was coming from. Therefore, his only real defense was to answer honestly with no hidden agenda of motives or interests.

Finally, R.O. reached back in his past for one incident that had put the focus for his professional life on honesty forever. "It was my English teacher in my junior year in high school," R.O. said. He had faked a book report, but the teacher caught him. She wore glasses with a chain on them and was a foot shorter than R.O. She made him miss football practice every afternoon to stay after school, read the book and write the book report. The teacher would not let him take the book home to work on it. When R.O. tried to sneak out of the room after putting the finished book report on the teacher's desk, "she jumped in front of me, put her hands on her hips, looked up at me and said, 'Young man, if you ever try to pull a dumb stunt like this again, I'm not going to take you to the principal, you and I are going to stand here toe-to-toe and slug it out.'" R.O. intoned that the incident left "kind of an impression on me that I didn't have to do dishonest things like that." It took awhile, R.O. said, but that incident soaked in and was most significant in his life in later years.

In answer to the question regarding the nature of the cooperation that existed among the state education associations and their leaders, R.O. stated that both the elected leadership and the staff of the NDEA provide excellent cooperation with the NDSBA. He said the evidence of cooperation "is manifested by the work that we do together, the meetings we've had, and the projects that we've undertaken jointly." If there is a problem, R.O. said it involves convincing the NDEA's membership and Board of Directors that cooperation is beneficial to teachers. The NDEA leadership continuously works to promote the idea of cooperation.

When R.O. first became Executive Director of the NDSBA, the elected NDEA President was not yet a full-time member of the NDEA's leadership team. R.O. said he got along with the two Presidents who have occupied the position full-time, one for four years and the other the past year. The people have changed but not the attitude and working relationships, according to R.O.

As an example of the continuing cooperation among the three state associations, R.O. described a recently issued joint financial statement at four press conferences across the state. He mentioned the Evaluation for Growth program as a superior example for continuing cooperation. R.O. listed the merit pay issue (where local rather than state initiatives were recommended by a task force) and integrative bargaining as further examples of successful state level cooperation. But R.O. said, "The Evaluation for Growth, that is what started the cooperating" we enjoy today. He said the integrative bargaining initiative was the most recent example of on-going cooperation while other activities are done on an ad hoc basis as needed. Joint testimony before the legislature on school funding and home schooling were other examples of cooperation.

R.O. reflected on the invitation the NDSBA received from the NDEA to participate when an evaluation team from the National Education Association was in the state. He said the NDSBA would reciprocate and ask the NDEA to participate in the NDSBA's formal evaluations.

> We serve jointly on so many task forces and committees, all represented on the task force for small rural schools, we are all represented on the Governor's task force for communication statewide. We see more of each other than we do of our own families.

R.O. next reviewed the NDSBA's relationship with the NDCSA. He said the relationship with the leadership there has been "friendly, warm, and ongoing." The change in Executive Secretaries hasn't had any negative effects at all, according to R.O.

The cooperation with the NDCSA is similar to that with the NDEA. R.O. said we all work jointly on the same projects.

> I might mention with both of them, the teachers and administrators, because of the communications we have, we are very often able to start talking about the problems and nip them in the bud, particularly on nonrenewal of contracts, discharge of personnel, and that kind of thing.

R.O. went on to say

> With the teachers, I should have mentioned earlier, on nonrenewal and negotiations, we have reached so many agreements that have made things easier. We have developed a resignation letter to replace nonrenewal for reduction-in-force purposes. That will save everybody a great deal of grief in the state.

R.O. discussed how he has gone to local school districts with the NDSBA attorney to represent the school board in superintendent-school board disagreement cases. Once there, he tries to resolve the problem to the mutual satisfaction of the parties involved. R.O. continued, "We developed a joint contract for superintendents. We also developed an evaluation system for

superintendents within the framework of Evaluation for Growth, but it is a separate procedure."

The North Dakota Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTC) and the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) are other state level education organizations with which the three associations work, according to R.O. "We work very closely" with both organizations, said R.O., and involve them in a number of meetings and activities. The person who now is the state superintendent of public instruction, an elected official in North Dakota, wants to be involved in what the associations do--unlike his predecessor, according to R.O. The parent-teacher organization is limited in its involvement since it does not have any full-time staff.

The dynamics of the work relationship among the leaders of the three organizations reflect both professional and personal considerations. "We go with great comfort," R.O. confided, "to each other's offices. Whose turn is it to serve coffee? That's where we go." R.O. thought it was in October of 1981 when the NDSBA unveiled a program called Evaluation for Growth. He invited L.J. to participate along with the NDEA President and W.H. "It was strictly our program," R.O. said emphatically. But the day after Thanksgiving in 1981, R.O. and W.H. went over to L.J.'s ranch, and the three of them road horseback together. "We got to talking about doing the program jointly among the three associations." According to R.O., "That's really where we started" along the path of cooperating. He went on to say

> the three of us had developed a friendship, a comaradiere, that transcended our differences. I can't really point my finger on what keyed it right at that particular time. It really was not surprising; it just seemed like a natural course of events to have it happen.

When asked if he believed the personalities involved were more crucial to cooperation than the issues, R.O. unhesitatingly stated, "Very crucial,

extremely crucial at the time." R.O. warned that the personalities of the leaders still are crucial to continued cooperation: "I think the wrong personality introduced into this leadership mix could drop relationships right back to where they were before 1980."

Communications are stressed by R.O. in these three-way cooperative relationships. "I see somebody from the NDEA staff a couple of times a week and talk on the phone to them probably another couple of times a week. We average some kind of contact once a day on the average." Since the current executive secretary of the NDCSA has been ill and with a substitute secretary covering the NDCSA office, R.O. has had "a great deal" of contact with the association recently.

R.O. characterizes personal relationships with the various state organizations leaders as a "sound friendship." In particular, R.O. mentioned social activities such as visiting at each other's homes and parties or other gatherings on neutral grounds.

> There's a great kidding that goes on, and we play practical jokes on each other -- it's open game on everyone at all times. One time W.H. was at a meeting and he filled out an expense form. He put on the form punitive damages and everything else -- something like $3,000 to come to a meeting at the NDSBA office. So I went out and got some rubber, and I carefully designed a check, a rubber check, and presented it to W.H. If you can find something to zing the guy about, you do.
>
> L.J. failed his motorcycle driving test. He received an inordinate amount of ribbing on that. I also told someone that if you see L.J. be sure to comment on his ears because he had an ear job. H s ears used to stick out, and he had surgery on them. He's really proud of those ears. Well, that wasn't true.
>
> When the last NDEA President left office, I gave him a life size picture of me. I had it blown up and framed. Then it appeared at the NDSBA annual convention in the ladies rest room there.

Former Executive Secretary of the NDCSA

The umbrella NDCSA employed its first executive secretary in 1981 to coordinate and give direction to the state level activities of the several state administrators associations. L.J. left that position in 1985 to become assistant superintendent of the state's largest local public school district and assumed the superintendency of that district in 1986. Therefore, L.J. was interviewed in the local school district's superintendent's office.

The most important quality for a state level education leader to have, according to L.J., is credibility with other people. The leader must be believable to legislators and administrators, for example, and truthful or all is lost. Companion to credibility is the ability to speak well before groups. Also, the leader must be able to communicate well in writing. Further, the leader needs to be well informed about the various political issues affecting education in the state and respond quickly and thoughtfully to those issues as they develop and relate to local school districts. Since NDCSA comprises different administrator groups from large and small school districts, a state level leader must always be cognizant of the diversity of opinion that exists across the state and work to achieve some "common ground" or understanding among the groups. According to L.J., the latter is "not an easy task."

In claiming that the leader has to be a good problem-solver, L.J. concluded that

> this gets back to consensus building. But I think you have to be a creative problem-solver always looking for compromise positions between and among folks. You have to be nonabrasive in dealing with people. You also must have a way of responding to people that does not make them even more angry. I guess you have to be intelligent and be able to observe the relationships that are occurring around you and see how particular policies might affect the different groups.

L.J. said he was good at the qualities he had just discussed. He argued that the evidence for this assessment was the fact that the NDCSA was built from nothing to a viable state level organization in a matter of four years. L.J. said he was evaluated "on several different functions that I've performed, and the evaluations were always excellent; so I really believe that an effective job was done." He thought that his strongest quality was his ability to relate to people in all settings.

L.J. revealed that one area in which he could have done a better job was legal assistance for local school district superintendents. With that self-criticism he meant that he did not like the confrontation legal situations always involve. He wanted to work things out, to compromise in a disagreement between a superintendent and the local school board. "If I did get criticism," L.J. said, "it was perhaps that I did not go out and really challenge school boards who were releasing their superintendents and principals." However, L.J. did not regret that he was more of a compromiser than an aggressor. He reflected, "We did a lot of things to bring folks together. I did not feel that punitive sanctions against school boards was a very good option because it divides people up, and I was trying to bring people together."

L.J. returned again to the credibility theme. At the time he left the position of Executive Secretary of NDCSA, there was some history in regard to working with the state legislature. Credibility had been built up there. Some of that building was due, in L.J.'s opinion, to the fact that he came to the job with some carryover credibility as the former state deputy superintendent of schools in the state's Department of Public Instruction. "I think that helped," L.J. asserted, "because I knew the legislative process; I knew the people and so on at the state level."

In a one person office with only one secretary, L.J. said his greatest problem was NDCSA's organizational structure itself. There were too many separate associations and their boards of control resulting in so many different points of view. L.J. said he envied the NDEA's large budget that enabled that association to employ so many people and have field staff throughout the state.

L.J. claimed that the state education associations in North Dakota had the best working relationships that existed anywhere in the United States. He described how closely he worked with the NDEA and NDSBA in his day-to-day activities as Executive Secretary of NDCSA. He considered the leaders of the other associations his personal friends and professional colleagues. There was considerable mutual respect, according to L.J. "The understanding we always had," said L.J., "was that we would agree to disagree and that should not then affect the relationship on other areas where we did agree." There was, according to L.J., a real attempt to make the associations work in the same direction where their goals were similar. The leaders tried to bring the associations together from both philosophical and policy points of view.

> As far as cooperation is concerned, I considered it to be excellent. They always tried to keep us informed of what they were doing and we did the same thing. We shared our publications and we met frequently. They weren't out to try to get the competitive advantage and neither were we.

As evidence of the cooperative arrangements, L.J. cited the Evaluation for Growth process. He confided that the actual outcomes of the process were probably not as important as the attitudinal adjustments that the parties to the process went through. L.J. continued, "We brought school board members, administrators and teachers together to discuss their concerns about evaluation. As I watched that process, each of the groups became more aware of the attitudes and feelings the other groups had in regard to evaluation." As

further evidence of cooperation, L.J. pointed to the joint testimony at state legislative hearings, especially in regard to the teacher retirement legislation. When the groups coalesce like that, the legislators had difficulty, according to L.J., rejecting their advice. Also, in the area of school finance, the groups worked together to persuade the legislature to allocate more money to elementary and secondary education. These were the examples that first came to L.J.'s mind concerning cooperative efforts among the three state level associations. Later, he mentioned data collection, especially teacher salaries, as another area of joint cooperation among the associations.

L.J. said that, in some ways, the legislature was viewed as a threat to the state level associations which helped to bring the associations together. When the legislature started dabbling in the matter of teacher performance evaluation through their interim committees, L.J. declared the issue was a matter for school boards, administrators and teachers. Therefore, it was important that the three groups made sure they took the initiative on performance evaluation.

L.J.'s recollection of the horseback riding episode which started the state level associations' cooperative efforts was similar to that of R.O. "First of all," L.J. wryly observed, "neither one of those other fellows can ride worth a darn. I want to make that point perfectly clear." Then L.J. recounted how he, R.O. and W.H. road his horses about ten miles north of Bismarck until they reached a small camper on L.J.'s land. They rested in the camper and there they first started talking about Evaluation for Growth as a joint process. They returned to Bismarck and continued formulating the process with other people. "That first day in the camper," L.J. said, "we had no thought that Evaluation for Growth was going to end up as big as it did." The

horseback ride was the start of it all, though it started out as a social activity with no thought of the kind of business it would lead to. "When we finished talking we sketched some things on paper, had some coffee and that is how it started," L.J. concluded.

Another group that became part of the coalition, according to L.J., included the PTC. Along with that association, the state education associations also worked with the Farmers Union and Rural Electric Cooperative organization in the passage of Measure 6, a statwide referendum, voted on in 1980, that assigned tax monies from oil production to education. Those groups together tried to make sure the measure was implemented the way it should have been, according to L.J. He recalled that the state PTC supported the coalition's efforts on funding issues and teacher retirement.

After the Measure 6 referendum, the four state level education associations remained together as a loose coalition, in L.J.'s words. "We just had an agreement," L.J. stated, "that we were going to meet frequently and try to cooperate."

During L.J.'s four years as NDCSA's Executive Secretary, the cooperation among the groups in the coalition increased. Still there are members in each group "who say we should not be involved or be cooperative with the other groups." However, L.J. insisted that the last six years had shown that cooperation gets better results, and the groups have a more reliable voice in policy issues.

In terms of personal relationships, L.J. pointed out that the leaders "were always quite close" and "are just good friends." They would get together for lunch, socially, at meetings. L.J. said he felt free to walk into the NDEA offices at any time, and the NDEA staff felt free to come to his office, too. He mentioned the close personal relationship he had with W.H. and the others

were "very fine people" as well. But L.J. did not have the close personal contact with the others as he did with W.H. However, L.J. added that he had worked very closely with the NDEA's president, too.

L.J. told how the old Prince Hotel in Bismarck had been a meeting place, especially for lunch. The hotel was about two blocks away from L.J.'s office and the NDEA's office building was about the same distance from the hotel. L.J. remembered that "many times we would happen to meet there at lunch time, and so we would just eat together." L.J. further mused.

> Sometimes we would ride together, just like professional wrestlers, I guess. They ride places together, tear each other apart, beat each other up and then ride home together. Sometimes that happened to us. We would go to different places together and then express maybe three different points of view at meetings. Then we would hop in the car and head home.

L.J. thought about W.H. and told how W.H. invited him out to dinner and L.J. found himself paying for it. "I don't know if he did this intentionally," L.J. said skeptically, "but when it came time to pay the bill, he had no checks and no money." L.J. said that event occurred in 1981, and "it took me five years to get some lunch out of him." Then there was the time L.J. and W.H. rode home together from a meeting in one of North Dakota's small rural school districts. W.H. was driving and was stopped by the state highway patrol. W.H. got a ticket. Later, L.J. chuckled, "I took up a collection for him, and all I got was thirty-six cents. So I called and told him I was going to send him the collection, but the postage cost would really deplete the funds. So I figured I had better deliver it to him."

L.J. described how he and R.O. roomed together when they attended the same meetings away from their offices. At one of these meetings, R.O.'s wife spent the night with R.O. She always thought that R.O. wore away from home what she thought was a valued purple, pink and yellow night shirt. R.O. said he would

never wear it, of course. L.J. then informed R.O.'s wife that she should forget about sending that night shirt along because he never wore it anyway. L.J. concluded, "There was always a continual kind of back and forth jabbing at each other in a friendly way. That's the way it is."

For various reasons, L.J. felt closer to R.O. than any of the NDEA leaders. L.J.'s and R.O.'s associations were closer in philosophy. Hence, they worked together more. For example, R.O.'s office collected salary data and L.J.'s office put it on the computer and printed it. Then, too, L.J. and R.O. were in similar situations in terms of resources available to them. "He was by himself," L.J. said, "and I was by myself and we felt we better stick together." Both he and R.O. were relatively new to their leadership positions and, L.J., in particular, struggled to get the NDCSA functioning that first year.

L.J. reminded himself how he went to the NDEA offices during that first legislative session when he was Executive Secretary of NDCSA and asked for help. He said he told the NDEA staff that he admired how their legislative program operated, including the tracking of bills. L.J. asked if he could use what the NDEA produced, and they said he could, and he did.

L.J. expressed a need for better relationships with personnel from the higher education system in the state. He said that some of the NDCSA's membership as well as their people tended to believe that they were in competition with each other. L.J. said he did not feel that way at all, but acknowledged that individual higher education institutions and the NDSCA had not related well enough in the past to have good working relationships.

Acting Executive Director of the NDEA

At the time W.H. was interviewed, he was Acting Executive Director of the NDEA. He was acting because the long time Executive Director had recently

passed away, and the NDEA was in the process of looking for a permanent successor. Because of the particular administrative style of the previous Executive Director which allowed for much independence and self-initiative on the part of the NDEA staff, W.H., as Assistant Executive Director, exerted strong influence in the cooperative efforts among the state level education associations. W.H. was allowed more visibility and influence in his leadership role than would have been the case with a more dominant and publicly visible Executive Director.

As NDEA's "point man" for relations with other state level education associations, W.H. was asked what qualities he thought marked an excellent state level education leader. W.H. said that the leader needs to have a high level of creativity. Along with that quality, the leader must be comfortable with change. W.H. said that he believed most people are uncomfortable with change, but a state level education leader must be uncomfortable with the status quo.

> There are always better ways to do things -- that there are opportunities to invent change and that a fear of change causes us to back off of this opportunity to invent change.

The leader has to be a secure person, said W.H., so that some tough decisions can be made. The nature of the organization as well as the leader can make both internal and external decision making very tough at times. Also, the state level education leader needs to be held in relatively high regard by the citizens of the state. Without that respect, the leader would not be very effective internally or externally.

W.H. rated himself "relatively high" on the qualities he mentioned. These included being creative, comfortable with change and uncomfortable with the status quo. However, he did not rate himself high in the matter of a strong sense of security. Because of the pending leadership change in the NDEA at the

time of interview, W.H. felt not sure of himself or to what extent he could assert his ideas.

> I am not a terribly high risk taker. I don't have any difficulty taking risk if I am convinced that what we are doing is the right and responsible thing. But I am not in a position where I am willing to risk my job like some people I know.

As for credibility in the larger community, W.H. believed his was good. He said his credibility with the state legislature was excellent as it was with the general education community. He said that excellent credibility extended to the school administrators and local school boards. He acknowledged, however, that through the years, he has played the role of adversary; but "they understand that, I think." W.H. claimed that he did not lose anyone's respect as long as they understood his role in NDEA and that there were responsible ways of playing an adversary.

When W.H. was a youth, he said he frequently found himself debating others over this or that issue. Further, W.H. always insisted on winning those debates.

> I have a strong athletic background and was always the leader, captain, whatever the case was on any of those high school or college teams. I'm not really sure why I was, but I was. I think that comes because I think I had my head screwed on right and had basically the respect of others with whom I worked.

As he went through college, W.H. recalled that he debated others mostly on injustices of any kind. It did not make any difference what the perceived injustice was. As he pursued his college work, W.H. struggled to find out what he really should be doing with his life. In the middle of his college years, W.H. said he turned to teaching which he asserted was the right decision.

Later during the structured interview, W.H. admitted that if he had the opportunity to do things differently in his life, he would not go into

professional education again. Of the three state education leaders interviewed, only W.H. said he would go into another kind of work. Both R.O. and L.J. said they would go into the education field again. R.O. said he would do it even sooner.

W.H. concluded that he had grown up with a "terribly strong work ethic." In the environment in which W.H. grew up, he was "directed" by people in his community to become a minister. W.H. stated that his intention, at first, was to be a minister; it was the epitome of any educated man. Except for study leading to the ministry, W.H. lamented that education was not very important in his community. Concurrent with the strong work ethic W.H. said that he grew up in an environment where personal honesty was extremely important. Dishonest persons were frowned upon in his hometown. "I think that all those qualities kind of influenced me," W.H. mused, "and helped with what I am doing today."

Antecedent to the current period of cooperation and collaboration was a dark time of near anarchy and confrontation in education at the state associations levels in the 1970's. According to W.H., the first five years he was with the NDEA was a time of great frustration for him. There was no umbrella state organization for school administrators or a fledgling one, at best, and the NDSBA was led by an executive director who did not wish to cooperate with the NDEA. It was just not possible at that time for the state level education associations to come together in pursuit of effective educational change.

The state education associations picture brightened in the early 1980's with the employment of L.J. as the first NDCSA executive secretary and the hiring of R.O. to replace the noncollaborative incumbent as executive director of NDSBA. Coincident with those two events was the election of the first full-time NDEA president. That individual, according to W.H., believed in a

"win-win" rather than a "win-lose" philosophy when it came to working with the other state level education associations.

W.H. stated the matter clearly when he said that "cooperation between organizations is truly enhanced by the types of people that represent those organizations." For W.H., the types of people was the number one factor in the development of state level cooperation. Number two in importance for W.H. was the common held belief among the new leaders that some problems could best be resolved through cooperation among the state associations. According to W.H., the leaders believed that before the memberships of the various associations did. There was risk involved, said W.H., for the leaders. Once cooperation started, W.H. said it was amazing how few issues the state level associations disputed with each other. "It's just incredible, one would never believe it," W.H. chortled.

W.H. believed he had impressed upon the NDEA that the best way to resolve a problem is at the lowest level possible. That level is the local school district. In order for the local school district's teachers, administrators and school board to solve a problem at their level, W.H. contended their state associations must lead the way in tri-party cooperation. W.H. recalled when even simple problems could not be solved at the local level. He said he was frustrated time after time as the NDEA took issues to court that should have been resolved at the local level. The judges, W.H. said, were astounded that the problems could not be resolved out of court. Now, however, W.H. claimed that problems were being resolved at the lowest level, a phenomenon that could not have been dreamed of before 1980.

W.H. praised the NDSBA's attorney who believed as W.H. did that everyone can win in the resolution of a problem at the local level. W.H. said that NDEA attorneys would rather have the NDSBA attorney to deal with in a dispute than

anyone else. The NDSBA attorney tries hard to resolve problems short of litigation. According to W.H, "I know that there were situations that, if the NDSBA attorney had not been there, there is no doubt in my mind that I would have used every bit of pull that I have to take the issues into the courts. There would have been no other way of resolving it."

In their interviews, W.H., R.O. and L.J. all stated that the statewide "evaluation for growth" program was one of the earliest and probably still the greatest single achievement that tri-party cooperation produced. According to W.H., the inception of that program came during an unlikely moment of creativity. Here is how W.H. tells of what happened.

> I guess that L.J. and I started to relate for some reason or another first. We jammed around together a great deal, and L.J. had these horses and we decided to go horseback riding one time. R.O. had unfortunately told us about his rodeo experience out there some place in Montana. So somehow or another he was invited along to ride these horses. As the three of us were riding across the hills, we got to talking about education. I think it is probably impossible for those three people to go riding and not talk about education. And I for the life of me cannot honestly remember how we got on this, but I know that it is an idea that I have held for a long time.

Then W.H. talked about how the state legislature had mandated evaluations for teachers twice a year. The evaluation systems that local school districts were using, according to W.H., were essentially meaningless. There was no choice but to try something. Then he claimed that "the concept of an evaluation for growth came first to me."

Conclusions

North Dakota was one state that has not been studied systemically by the scholars of state politics of education. McGivney (1984) listed and summarized the studies involving twenty-two other states in an effort to fit the state education governance patterns into Iannaccone's typology and his own

revised typology. Mazzoni and Campbell (1976) earlier investigated the influence of state level education associations and others, including chief state school officers, on state education policymaking in twelve states. Though not the subject of previous studies, we believe that North Dakota's experience informs the study of various typologies and research efforts on state level education politics and governance.

We opened our discussion with the view that North Dakota appeared to fit the classic Iannaccone typology and was now at the Type II stage and, perhaps, nearly ready to enter the Type III stage. Our interviews with the state education association leaders, actual observations of their behavior in various settings and the products of that behavior, along with socioeconomic and demographic characterics in the state, prompt us to suggest two modifications to the classic typology.

It appears that North Dakota may have reverted to Iannaccone's Type II state education influence structure in the 1980's after experiencing Type III during the 1970's. Similarly, a serious alteration in circumstances was associated with the changes among Pennsylvania's major education groups which moved them essentially from Iannaccone's Type III to Type II on the issue of school funding (Karper and Boyd, 1988, pp. 48-49). The North Dakota leaders we interviewed, especially the account of the 1970's by W.H., rather clearly pointed to that time as one of fragmentation and unrest. Wirt and Kirst (1982) argued that state educational policy making and interest groups do not fit neatly into sequential typologies such as Iannaconne's after 1970. Indeed, they claimed the monolith stage was irretrievable and, except for an Illinois aberration in the 1960's, the syndical or bureaucratic control stage was unattainable. McGivney's conclusion (1984), based on previous studies, that there existed a sequential pattern in each state that evolved over time from

disparate local control to centralized bureaucratic control may not precisely reflect the experience in North Dakota.

Karper and Boyd (1988, p. 51) agreed with Kirst and Sommers (1981) that "grand coalitions" emerge as state education policymaking becomes more centralized. They also agreed that Iannoconne's Type IV stage was impossible because of the "deep-seated differences" among state level education groups currently. Proposed was a "statewide general aid collective" as an alternative to stage IV. The North Dakota experience, on the other hand, suggested that stage IV may indeed be both possible and practical to attain.

The North Dakota pattern appeared to correspond to the professional career stages model as described by Burke, Christensen and Fessler (1984). That model posits that there are indeed stages over time in a professional educator's career, but the stages are dynamic and interactive. They are not necessarily sequential in a deterministic way. People can be at any stage in the model at any time depending on personal and environmental circumstances. In North Dakota, both personal (the advent of new leaders on the scene at approximately the same time) and the environmental (absence of regional service associations or agencies, onset of economic difficulties and recent legislative mandates) circumstances resulted in the Type II stage after a decade wherein elements of the Type III model seemed to exist.

On the other hand, North Dakota may just as easily be considered a fledgling example of Iannaccone's Type IV stage of high interaction between state level associations, the legislature, state education agency and the state university leading to a centralized and ultimately bureaucratized pattern of state educational governance. University personnel, particularly from the University of North Dakota, assisted the NDSBA in developing and implementing workshops for its members, and the NDEA kept the Dean of the College of

Education on retainer as a consultant. A recent legislative decision to place administrators on a state legislative interim committee to study school finance bears some resemblance to the characteristics of a syndic.

Because of the small size and isolated geographic nature of most local school districts in North Dakota, these districts, especially in hard economic times, have continued to look to the state level for increased financial support, policy making and program development guidance. The relative ease with which state education association leaders are able to communicate directly with legislators, the chief state school officer, state university personnel and even the governor all suggest a possible movement towards the Type IV governance and influence stage. Then the historical North Dakota pattern would be as follows: Type I, II, III, II, IV. This pattern and perhaps the relative ease with which North Dakota appears to be approaching the last stage contrasts sharply to the "welter of conflicting tendencies" that characterize the Minnesota educational policy system sometimes touted as one of only two or three states tentatively assigned to the fourth stage by other researchers (Mazzoni, 1985).

It may inform current theory and research that North Dakota seems to have departed from the sequential typology assumption. Other researchers might pay more attention to this great plains state as an interesting example in the refinement of the current typologies.

Beyond these considerations, the North Dakota experience suggests some powerful lessons for the practice of educational leadership at the state level. One such lesson closely approximates Fiedler's conclusion (1979) from his contingency leadership theory that the situation ought to determine the kind of leaders appointed in state level education organizations. If a state level association wants collaboration and cooperation, it should select leaders like

R.O., L.J., W.H. and NDEA and NDSBA presidents who have demonstrated the qualities of honesty, believability, creativity, good humor, problem-solving at the lowest levels, personal communications skills and mutual respect that will likely ensure win-win solutions to problems and a more unified purpose and set of goals for education in the state. Karper and Boyd (1988, pp. 47-48) pointed to the changes in leadership personnel among the Pennsylvania state education groups as an important factor in the advent of coalitional activity there. The positive attitudes of open mindedness and cooperation seemed to permeate the personalities of the more recent leaders.

The literature on leadership and change in education argues that personal communications, usually one-to-one, on matters of professional interest and impact to educators are crucial to goal acceptance and attainment and the adoption and implementation of innovations (Fullan, 1982; House, 1979). The North Dakota state level education leaders have demonstrated their commitment to one-to-one communication for themselves and their respective constituents.

Finally, the North Dakota experience may be instructive and useful for other states where geographic, demographic and economic conditions are similar. These states would be less populated, a narrow rather than diversified economic base characterized by many small, usually isolated, local school districts and a weak or nonexistent regional service agency system. To advance education in such states, the local districts are dependent upon and look to state level guidance and direction. However, even in the more socioeconomically varigated states, the qualities of leadership identified by W.H., L.J. and R.O. and the products of those qualities can be instructive, especially where Type III influence appears to be the dominant condition but Type II or Type IV could better serve educational progress in the state.

There is no guarantee, however, that a small state population necessarily

results in the stages that North Dakota experienced. A recent study of state education policy development in Vermont indicated perceptions of almost no communication and involvement between state officials and local educators regarding reforms mandated by the state (Johnson and Proulx, 1987).

To conclude our commentary here, we remind ourselves of the importance of symbolism and myth making in social organizations. Deal and Kennedy (1982) found that strong organizations have symbolic leaders who first work with and may ultimately change the organizational culture. The characteristics they describe for the successful symbolic leader include the ability to work with subcultures and cabals to reconcile differences among the subgroups by promoting their importance in the larger organization. Certainly, the state leaders we interviewed put a premium on reconciling differences among the associations and in emphasizing their importance to each other in advancing education in North Dakota. The horseback riding episode and the practical jokes described earlier by each of the three leaders interviewed enrich and bring a special identity to the culture of the state education coalition. These "rites and rituals" provide grist for the myth making that characterizes strong organizations populated by symbolic leaders.

The North Dakota experience should inform current research and theory on state level education influentials. The experience informs through the implication that sociological and, therefore, structural models of state educational influence need to include some psychological or behavioral principles involving individual personalities and attitudes. The resulting combination we think will assist students and observers of state level education influentials to view the interaction among the several state education associations as a culture amenable to the kind of leadership qualities exhibited by the state education leaders we interviewed for this study.

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